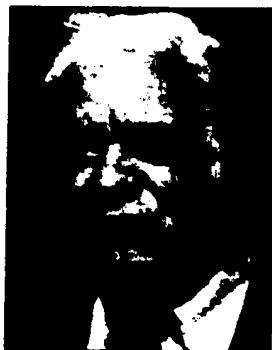


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## COVER STORY

# Contra chiefs try to cement united front



By Charlie Archambault  
**ADOLFO CALERO: 'We can work together'**

By L.A. Jolldon  
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USA TODAY

MIAMI — Meeting secretly in a succession of cool hotel towers, high above Biscayne Bay's blue waters, a handful of militant Nicaraguan exiles are locked in a heated struggle.

Seated at a conference table, with a view of a sleek skyline, they argue over sharing power and resources — and how to run the sputtering USA-backed rebel effort against Managua's Sandinista rulers.

The special meetings that began a month ago and intensified 10 days ago — monitored by CIA agents and visited by envoys from exile groups and the Reagan administration — are expected to come to a head today or Thursday.

"There are differences" among the civilian rebel leaders, said Adolfo Calero, the senior contra (short for contra-revolucionario) politician. "But we can work together."

Today, Calero said, they will discuss the drive by two newer directors of United Nicaraguan Opposition, Arturo Cruz and Alfonso Robelo, to run UNO by majority rule.

UNO, formed last year, comprises several contra groups. Calero has been head of the largest — the Nicaraguan

Democratic Force (FDN), formed under CIA auspices — since 1983.

The rebel leaders want to show Congress they have broad political support, have not wasted or stolen USA aid and are worthy of more funds for thousands of guerrilla fighters, far away in the mountains of Honduras and Nicaragua.

Mostly, the Miami exiles want to prove this is not just a room-service revolution.

But there are skeptics. "I think it's rather hypocritical," said Rep. Albert Bustamante, D-Texas, who has voted against more aid to the contras. "They ought to be meeting in the jungles of Honduras, not in a luxury hotel in Miami."

Calero says Miami is simply a logical, convenient "crossroads" for exile leaders like himself, with good access to Central American travel and solid political support for their anti-leftist cause from a strong Cuban community. (Vice President George Bush got a rousing response here Tuesday to a speech castigating Cuba's Fidel Castro and praising the USA's 1 million Cubans for producing "twice as much wealth each year" as Cuba's 10 million people.)

Miami reverberates with a Latin pulse. But wherever their headquarters, the Nicaraguan rebels would have to deal with some serious problems:

■ **Prolonged infighting.** Arturo Cruz, a former ambassador to the USA who aborted a 1984 campaign for president of Nicaragua, wants clearer civilian control over the contra guerrilla force and more financial accountability. His challenge of Calero's authority and close ties with Col. Enrique Bermudez, contra military chief, instigated this month's intense, internal jockeying.

■ **Threatened funds.** The House will vote on contra aid again June 9. Cruz has been reported close to resigning. Moderate contra backers are pressing him to stay, saying that would torpedo the aid.

■ **External investigations.** Long-rumored reports of contra involvement in drug and arms smuggling re-surfaced this spring. Federal agencies say there is no proof of wrongdoing. But after a federal audit of \$27 million in aid to the contras could not account for nearly half, a House subcommittee subpoenaed records of contra bank accounts in Miami.

■ **Diplomatic sandtraps.** A group of Latin American countries — known as Contadora — finally has reached a regional agreement that Nicaragua may sign on June 6. The Pentagon issued an analysis Tuesday saying the accord would disarm the contras while allowing the Sandinistas to continue their buildup and subversion of neighboring countries.

The analysis said the USA eventually would be left with no alternative except massive military intervention to combat Sandinista policies.

A necessary step toward solving these problems is an accord among Calero.

Cruz and their colleagues.

Rep. Dave McCurdy, D-Okla., said the contras must broaden their support and prove financial, humanitarian and personal "accountability. I think we have a right to know who they are."

Even then, President Reagan's point man on contra aid, Rep. Robert Michel, R-Ill., said Tuesday he finds "a kind of a sense of drifting" in administration policy on Central America.

Robert Leiken, Central America expert at the Carnegie Endowment for Peace, said even hard-line contra supporters are calling for political "reform" of the rebels. "Today and tomorrow will be a showdown. It's all up to Mr. Calero."

Janio Sequelra, an editor at a new exile newspaper, *La Estrella De Nicaragua*, said, "People think the FDN is doing good but could do better if there was no internal fighting."

Edgar Chamorro, a former FDN leader who renounced his contra ties several years ago and considers them a "proxy army," believes the CIA is "in control of all the (contra) meetings."

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Calero said the contras exchange intelligence with the CIA, but denied the agency directs strategy. He said Reagan's special Central America envoy, Philip Habib, visited recently but "only to talk about Contadora."

While Calero, Cruz and Alfonso Robelo try to settle their strategic and political differences, the contra military struggles to keep troops in the field in the five-year-old guerrilla action.

With the onset of Nicaragua's rainy season, the contras have stepped up their hit-and-run tactics. Contras this week captured a group of West Germans during an attack in southeastern Nicaragua. Calero said the eight are considered "prisoners of war" since they were captured during a military action and will be released "in accordance with the Geneva Convention."

And the contra military force — whose largest units operate under Col. Bermudez out of base camps near the Honduran border — was bolstered this month by a union with most of the commanders of a small, independent anti-Sandinista force that for years has operated on Nicaragua's southern border with Costa Rica.

But their action means the end of the military career of the famed "Commander Zero" — Eden Pastora Gomez, a man many once thought ideally suited for toppling the Sandinistas.

A daring military hero of the Sandinista revolution, Pastora became disillusioned and vowed to overthrow the new leaders. He survived assassination attempts and rallied at those who accepted CIA help as "traitors."

Now, with most of his commanders gone, he and 79 fighters and followers are under voluntary custody in Costa Rica, awaiting political asylum.